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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

BY  
THE PRESIDENT  
ON MX BASING

Room 450  
Old Executive Office Building

10:51 A.M. EDT

I have a statement to make about the new strategic deterrence system which I consider to be quite significant. Some analysts would equate it with two other major decisions made by Presidents in this century: The first, to establish the Strategic Air Command itself under President Truman, and the subsequent decision by President Kennedy to establish the silo-based Minuteman missile system.

For nearly 30 years, now, our Nation has deterred attack and has kept the peace through a complementary system of land, sea and airborne nuclear forces, commonly known as the strategic triad.

By maintaining the special strengths and the advantages offered by each of the three separate forces, we make it impossible for any enemy to counter all of them.

My Administration is now embarked on a program to modernize and to improve the ability of our entire strategic triad, all three systems, to survive any attack. Our bomber force is being strengthened with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. Our strategic submarine force is being upgraded by Trident submarines and Trident missiles.

However, as a result of increasing accuracy of strategic systems, fixed land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles or ICBMs located in silos such as our Minuteman, are becoming vulnerable to attack. A mobile ICBM system will greatly reduce this vulnerability. Therefore, I decided earlier this year to proceed with full-scale development and deployment of a new, large mobile ICBM, known as the MX. I made this decision to assure our country a secure strategic deterrent now and in the future.

The MX will enable us to continue with a modernized, unsurpassed, survivable strategic deterrent ICBM, submarine-launched, and heavy bomber triad: ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and the heavy bomber triad, armed with cruise missiles.

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Clearly, the way we base the MX to enhance its own security from attack is vital to the ability it has to defend our country.

At the time that I made the decision to build the MX, I established five essential criteria which the basing system would have to meet. First, it must contribute to the ability of the strategic forces to survive an attack. Second, it must be verifiable so as to set a standard which can serve as a precedent for the verifiability of mobile ICBM systems on both sides. Third, it must minimize the adverse impact on our own environment. Fourth, its deployment must be at a reasonable cost to the American taxpayer. And fifth, it must be consistent with existing SALT agreements and with our SALT III goal of negotiating for significant mutual reductions in strategic forces.

In light of these criteria and after full consultation with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and my other principal advisers, I have decided upon the following configuration for basing the MX missile system. The MX will be based in a sheltered, road-mobile system to be constructed in our Western deserts, the total exclusive area of which will not exceed 25 square miles.

This system will consist of 200 missile transporters or launchers, each capable of rapid movement on a special roadway connecting approximately 23 horizontal shelters.

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Let me point out how this meets the criteria that I have established. First, it increases the survivability of our missiles by multiplying the number of targets which would have to be attacked, because not knowing in which of the 23 shelters the missile was located, all 23 shelters would have to be targeted in order to be sure to attack the missile.

The capacity of the missiles to move rapidly ensures that no attacker will be able to find out ahead of time where the missiles might be located and attack just those locations only. In fact, the missiles would be able to change shelters during the flight time of an enemy ICBM. Moreover, the system is flexible enough so that we can adjust the scale of deployment either up or down in response to a future enemy threat, or to progress on future SALT negotiations.

Secondly, the system is adequately verifiable. The special roadways will be confined to designated areas, and the associated missile transporters will be incapable of moving other than on those designated roadways.

The shelters will be designed so they may be opened in order to demonstrate that no extra missiles are hidden within them. These and other features will make this system adequately verifiable.

Third, the system minimizes the impact on the environment. The shelters are flush with the ground. The public will retain access to the area. Only the shelters themselves will be fenced off. The entire system, as I said earlier, will take only about 25 square miles of land out of public use.

Fourth, the system is affordable. The projected cost over the full 10-year period, total cost, to develop, to produce and to deploy is \$33 billion in 1980 dollars. While this acquisition cost may vary somewhat as the program proceeds, it's important to recognize that the cost of this system in constant dollar terms will be no greater than the cost of any one of the original three legs of our strategic triad, either the B-52 force or the Polaris-Poseidon force or the Minuteman ICBM system.

Finally, this system is compatible with existing SALT agreements and with our objectives for SALT III. Deploying this system will make it clear to the Soviet Union that they will gain no strategic advantage out of continuing the nuclear arms race. This is a fundamental pre-condition to more effective arms control agreements. Equally important, this system points in the direction of reductions of strategic arms because we are giving better protection with a force of fewer missiles. Without such a mobile shelter system, the only way we can maintain our deterrent could be to increase greatly the number of our strategic systems or nuclear missiles.

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In the course of making the series of decisions that led to this announcement, I carefully studied the potential threat to our Minuteman force. That threat is real. The system I have outlined this morning does the best job of meeting that threat, while also fulfilling the conditions that I specified at the outset. The system is survivable, it's verifiable, it has a minimum impact on the environment, it's affordable in cost and it's consistent with our SALT goal of deep reductions in strategic arms.

In sum, this system will enhance our Nation's security, both by strengthening our strategic deterrent and by offering the prospect of more effective arms control. This system is not a bargaining chip. It's a system that America needs and will have for its security. I'm confident that the American people will support its deployment.

Unhappily, we do not yet live in the kind of world that permits us to devote all our resources to the works of peace. And as President, I have no higher duty than to ensure that the security of the United States will be protected beyond doubt. As long as the threat of war persists, we will do what we must to deter that threat to our Nation's security. If SALT II is ratified and SALT III is successful, then the time may come when no President will have to make this kind of decision again and the MX system will be the last weapon system of such enormous destructive power that we will ever have to build. I fervently pray for that time, but until it comes, we will build what we must, even as we continue to work for mutual restraint in strategic armaments.

Secretary Brown is with us and he is willing to answer your questions. Thank you very much.

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(AT 10:02 A.M. EDT)